

Discovering & Developing Starter Homes



What are Starter Homes?

Homes like duplexes, fourplexes, and cottage courts that fit seamlessly into neighborhoods, providing affordable, walkable options for all ages and incomes. These housing types were once common in U.S. neighborhoods before zoning laws pushed them out.

Why They Matter for Idaho

- Expand housing choices for seniors, families, and workers
- Keep communities walkable and vibrant
- Preserve character while offering more affordability
- Support multigenerational living and small builders

Model Policy Resource: Re-Legalizing Starter Homes

Purpose: City-level reform to remove barriers and legalize small-scale housing across all communities.

Key Provisions:

- Allow duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes in most residential zones
- Simplify permitting for accessory dwelling units (ADUs)
- Establish clear, objective design standards to ensure neighborhood compatibility
- Limit excessive parking requirements that inflate costs

Why Idaho Needs This:

- New housing is currently illegal in too many areas
- Families and workers are priced out due to restrictive zoning
- Neighbor-friendly middle housing can meet demand while preserving character

Local Opportunities: Expanding Starter Home Options

Best Practices:

- Create zoning categories that allow multiple housing types on standard residential lots
- Implement “pattern zoning” with pre-approved designs that fit existing neighborhood styles
- Offer incentives for small builders to construct ADUs and infill homes
- Use public engagement campaigns to counter myths about density

Practical Applications:

- Urban areas: expand gentle density near jobs and schools
- Smaller towns: use lot-splits and cottage courts to add affordable homes while protecting farmland

